

THE SECRETARY OF DEFENSE  
WASHINGTON, D.C. 20301

1 July 1969

Honorable J. W. Fulbright  
Chairman, Committee on Foreign Relations  
United States Senate  
Washington, D. C. 20510

Dear Mr. Chairman:

In reviewing the transcript of my testimony before your Committee on June 23, 1969, two matters appeared to me to be particularly troublesome from the standpoint of the publication of an unclassified version. The first concerns the wholesale deletion of Mr. Helms's testimony. While I completely agree with the necessity for this action, it does leave the public record incomplete. Since the major purpose of this hearing was to explore whether any differences existed between Mr. Helms and myself or between Department of Defense positions and those taken by the Intelligence Community, it should be obvious that the deletion of Mr. Helms's testimony from the public version creates certain grave obstacles to a balanced understanding of what transpired. Accordingly, the reader of this record should be forewarned that no conclusions, one way or the other, should be drawn from the printed testimony with regard to the position taken by Mr. Helms on any particular aspect of the intelligence estimates.

The second matter involves, essentially, a problem of semantics. The transcript reflects considerable confusion over such terms as "1st strike weapon," "1st strike capability," and "1st strike intentions." Notwithstanding several hours of intense discussion of these terms before your Committee, I fear that a mutual understanding of their meaning still eludes us. This is particularly unfortunate because it is essential that both the Congress and the public understand the character of the threat which led to the President's SAFEGUARD proposal. Therefore, I would like to restate the issue in terms that avoid the semantic difficulties which apparently trouble some of the members of your Committee when 1st strike terminology is used.

As you well know, the strategic nuclear war policy of the United States since the end of World War II has been firmly based on the concept of deterrence. To achieve deterrence we must have what my predecessor Robert McNamara called an "Assured Destruction" capability. He defined this term in his last Posture Statement as follows: "... an ability to inflict at all times and under all foreseeable conditions an unacceptable degree of damage upon any single aggressor, or combination of aggressors -- even after absorbing a surprise attack." He went on to say, "One can add many refinements to this basic concept, but the fundamental principle involved is simply this: it is the clear and present ability to destroy the attacker as a viable 20th Century nation and an unwavering will to use these forces in retaliation to a nuclear attack upon ourselves or our allies that provides the deterrent. . ."

Thus the question that presents itself is whether the Soviet Union could achieve by the mid-1970s a sufficient capability, in a surprise attack, to reduce our surviving strategic offensive forces below that critical minimum level required for Assured Destruction. This, Mr. Chairman, is the crucial issue, because if the Soviets should achieve such a capability, or believe they have achieved such a capability, our deterrent would be lost and the chances of a global nuclear war greatly increased.

It is my carefully considered judgment, in which all of my principal military and civilian advisors agree, that the Soviet Union could achieve such a capability, or reach a position where they believe they have achieved such a capability, by the mid-1970s -- if we do nothing now to offset it. This judgment is based upon the following conclusions:

1. The Soviet Union could acquire a capability to destroy virtually all of our MINUTEMAN missiles. To be able to do so they would need: (a) at least 420 SS-9s with three independently targeted re-entry vehicles which have a capability of separating from one another by some relatively small number of miles; (b) each of these re-entry vehicles would have to have a warhead of approximately 5 megatons and a reasonably good accuracy; (c) the SS-9s would have to be retargetable; and (d) the range would have to be sufficient to reach all of the MINUTEMAN sites. It is my understanding that the technical community and the intelligence community agree that the Soviet Union could have that capability by the mid-1970s.

2. The Soviet Union could acquire a capability to threaten severely the survival of our alert bombers. To do so they would need: (a) a force of about 15 Y-class (POLARIS-type) submarines on station off our shores; and (b) the ability to launch the missiles on a depressed trajectory. It is my understanding that there is no disagreement within the intelligence community that they could have this capability as well by the mid-1970s.
3. Although we confidently expect our POLARIS/POSEIDON submarines to remain highly survivable through the early to mid-1970s, we cannot preclude the possibility that the Soviet Union in the next few years may devise some weapon, technique or tactic which could critically increase the vulnerability of those submarines. Nor can we preclude the possibility that the Soviet Union might deploy a more extensive and effective ABM defense which could intercept a significant portion of the residual warheads. In any event, I believe it would be far too risky to rely upon only one of the three major elements of our strategic retaliatory forces for our deterrent.

In summary, Mr. Chairman, it is entirely possible that the Soviet Union could achieve by the mid-1970s a capability to reduce, in a surprise attack, our surviving strategic offensive forces below the minimum level required for "Assured Destruction," and thus gravely weaken our deterrent. In my judgment, the overall strategic balance between the United States and the Soviet Union is much too close to run that risk. Therefore, something more must be done now to ensure a favorable strategic balance in the mid-1970s and beyond.

Short of achieving a workable agreement with the Soviet Union on the limitation of strategic armaments, which at best will take some time, we are convinced that the deployment of Phase I of SAFEGUARD would be the most prudent and economical course we could pursue at this particular juncture. This action would place us in a position to move forward promptly not only with the defense of our MINUTEMAN and bomber forces should the Soviet threat

develop as I have described, but also with the defense of our population against the Chinese ICBM threat should that emerge during the next few years.

Mr. Chairman, I believe you will agree that this letter should be made part of the public record and inserted before Director Helms's prepared statement, the text of which cannot, of course, be published.

Sincerely,

/s/

MEL LAIRD

☐ UNCLASSIFIED

☐ INTERNAL

☐ CONFIDENTIAL

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Approved For Release 2005/07/22 : CIA-RDP80B01495R000100140018-0

## ROUTING AND RECORD SHEET

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TO: (Officer designation, room number, and building)

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COMMENTS (Number each comment to show from whom to whom. Draw a line across column after each comment.)

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Attached is a copy of a letter from Secretary Laird to Chairman Fulbright of 1 July obtained for us by [ ] 25X1  
[ ] Although [ ] caution 25X1  
that "close handling is obviously desired," he says that there is no reason why the people in Laird's office with whom we have been working on this matter shouldn't know that we have received a copy informally.

We understand from the Foreign Relations Committee staff that they find Laird's request that this letter be made part of the record quite troublesome and don't know what to do about it. Therefore, I would not be surprised if the Committee asks for our comments. 25X1

JOHN M. MAURY  
Legislative Counsel

cc:  
DEI ✓  
DD&T  
En/Dir  
D/ONE  
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